

# Introduction

**“Information is the currency of democracy.”  
—Thomas Jefferson**

New England is a land of both tradition and innovation. Well established small-town democracy, a tradition of educational excellence and a heritage of cultural and intellectual leadership have lasted since the earliest days of English settlement here. At the same time, New England has also always been creating and inventing. From the revolutionary actions of Hancock and Adams, to the mechanical innovations of Eli Whitney, and the philosophy of Thoreau, up to the biomedical discoveries of the present day, New England has been a crucible for new ideas.

At EPA-New England, we have proudly adopted this heritage—keeping those traditions that work, while creating new approaches and new ideas to improve upon them. Over the last 28 years we have seen many successes in our mission of protecting New England’s environment and the health of the residents who depend upon it, and we value that tradition of success. But as new challenges occur, new approaches are needed. We at EPA-New England have committed ourselves to embracing the New England tradition of relentless experimentation and improvement. Our goal is to not only work for New England, but to also become, as New England has been many times, a place to develop ideas and models for the rest of the country.

One of our improvements began five years ago as a new tradition at EPA-New England: the annual *State of the New England Environment* report. This report has two aims. First, to present to the people of New England a picture of the current status of their environment: its present state, and the threats it faces. And second, to show what we at EPA are doing to meet those threats, and how we are making progress towards smarter, cleaner and cheaper environmental protection for the citizens of our region.

## New Directions

Three themes stand out in this year’s report. First, EPA-New England is continuing to focus on the places of New England, measuring our success not by bureaucratic accounting, but on the effect we have on the places we are charged with protecting. We are continuing to expand our commitment to work in partnership with communities, businesses, and governments of New England. And finally, we are addressing new challenges and new issues that face our environment as we move into the next millennium.

## New England Places

From the sandy shores of Cape Cod to the mountains of New Hampshire and Vermont, from the great north woods to bustling cities, New England’s places are rich and varied. At EPA-New England we are tailoring our approaches to the different challenges of our region’s diverse places. This year, one section of the *State of the New England Environment*



Photo: Roy Crystal

report focuses on the watersheds of New England. Each of us lives in a unique watershed—whether the historic and heavily settled Quinnipiac in Connecticut, or the wild and scenic Aroostook in Maine—and as we each learn about our own watershed’s heritage and the problems it faces, we can begin to take steps to preserve its value for future generations.

Another place where we have directed our activities at EPA-New England is the urban areas of New England. We are addressing lead poisoning and asthma that threaten especially the children of our cities.

Our brownfields program continues to help abandoned properties get cleaned up and put to beneficial use. We believe that these and other activities to make cities cleaner, safer and more livable are an important step in keeping New England strong.

## Partnerships

One of the major efforts of the last five years at EPA-New England has been changing the relationships we have with the businesses and government facilities we regulate, with our state partners in environmental protection, and most importantly, with the citizens of New England. As highlighted in this report, our office of Assistance and Pollution Prevention is helping hundreds of businesses to not only comply with environmental regulations, but to make their environmental performance go beyond what the law requires. We are working closely with the states of New England on new ways to improve environmental regulation—for instance approving Massachusetts's Environmental Results Program under the federal project XL.

And we are seeing the benefits of getting residents in communities throughout New England to be more involved with our work. Cooperative agreements to clean up PCBs in Pittsfield and New Bedford, Mass, to remediate the Pine Street Barge Canal superfund site in Burlington, Vermont and to oversee cleanup at the Massachusetts Military Reservation would not have been possible without the active involvement of the local communities showing EPA how to do our job better. This year saw a number of projects, such as the many EMPACT projects, to bring more useful environmental information to the public. We continue to look for other ways to involve communities in our work.

## New Challenges

While tremendous progress has been made on the environmental issues of the last twenty-five years, we are facing new challenges unimagined at the time the EPA was created. To address some of these challenges, EPA-New England has initiated programs on persistent chemicals like mercury, and addressed non-point source pollution in innovative ways like a tradable permit system in Wayland, Massachusetts. We are looking beyond our regional borders, working with Canada on transborder pollution issues, and cooperating to stop the smuggling of harmful CFCs. Through cooperative efforts, EPA-New England is also spreading the hard-won expertise of our staff and New England companies throughout the world.

This year EPA-New England took on a new threat: sprawl and unplanned development, unveiling our action plan for liveable communities at an EPA-sponsored conference in February, 1999. We see fighting sprawl as a prime example of our mission here at EPA-New England, because in the end, sprawl, like all environmental problems, is about the quality of our lives. Unchecked sprawl not only destroys open space, pollutes our water, and increases the air pollution from automobiles, but it also threatens the character and livability of the communities that make New England so special. By creating new and better ways to combat sprawl and other forms of environmental degradation, we are working to preserve the best parts of our New England traditions and way of life.

The tradition of citizen involvement in New England is the one we hold most dear, and we at EPA-New England want to see all of New England's residents take up that tradition. You, the reader can learn more about all of these issues through this report, through EPA's website and other resources listed at the end of this report, and through personally experiencing the great richness of New England's environment.